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The FBI Story

We learned to despise informers recruited by government, when those governments were "fascist" or "communist." We were revolted by tales of youngsters spying on their elders, of phones tapped, mail intercepted, knocks on the door (no warrants), wholesale secret surveillance, police dossiers of allegations about suspected "subversives." We called it a police state.

The evening of March 8, 1971 (the night of the Ali-Frazier fight) an anonymous group calling itself the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI removed documents from the Media, Pennsylvania FBI offices - more than a thousand according to the Justice Department, though how many more than a thousand we are not told. (The agent who ran the office will shortly take up residence in Atlanta, Georgia, after his 30 days suspension without pay.) Copies were distributed. The *Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post*, to whom they had been sent, selectively published or paraphrased the documents, generally leaving out names and other identifying material. Attorney General Mitchell appealed to the press (though he didn't attempt to get an injunction) not to publish what they had received - in the interests of internal and national security and for the protection of agents and informants. The Justice Department said that this selection from the files gave a misleading account of the FBI's work and served only to discredit the Bureau. For example, it claimed that a report on a Philadelphia-area college professor was simply part of the FBI's general efforts to apprehend two women involved in a Boston bank holdup in which a policeman was killed.

Six of the documents are about black groups. In one instance, J. Edgar Hoover ordered "discreet, preliminary inquiries" (beginning November 4, 1970) into "all BSUs (Black Student Unions) and similar organizations organized to project the demands of black students, *which are not presently under investigation.*" (italics added) Since BSUs "and similar groups . . . are targets for influence and control by violence-prone Black Panther (BPP) and other extremists," the directive continued, the "increased campus disorders involving black students pose a definite threat to the Nation's stability and security." Mr. Hoover could not "overemphasize the importance of expeditious, thorough, and discreet handling of these cases. The violence, destruction, confrontations, and disruptions on campuses make it mandatory

that we utilize to its capacity our intelligence-gathering capabilities." Agents were instructed to gather up everything they could and within the month "determine the size, aims, purposes, activities, leadership, key activists, and extremist interest or influence in these groups," all this to be done "carefully . . . [so] as to avoid criticism." The surveillance would cover "junior colleges and two-year colleges as well as four-year colleges."

The National Black Economic Conference is the subject of an earlier memo. Talks with the cashier and head of the computer center of the bank at which the NBEC kept a checking account are recorded. Through them, the FBI got microfilm copies of checks drawn on the account and copies of the NBEC's bank statements. The informer apologized that their computer system couldn't give "the nature and source of deposits and credits to this account." Bell Telephone handed over the names of the subscribers to the NBEC's phones. Brief summaries of several days of phone tapping were included.

Two other memos (one from "a source who has furnished reliable information in the past") describe meetings of black community and church groups (with the names listed of all who attended except for "three or four unidentified people") and routine organizational discussions. (Mr. X "will be Chairman . . . as this is the best way to have his name before the public.") A local chief of police reports on conversations held between local college officials, the state police, and the Bureau concerning student violence that might follow the presentation of nonnegotiable demands by the college's Afro Students' Society. Since it was thought that the students would "take whatever steps they feel necessary," full police arrangements were being snapped in place to put down the revolution whenever it came. The names of all the members of the society were freely given to the Bureau.

Then there is a call for "all agents" (in this case 185) to prepare for the first convention of NABS (National Association of Black Students) by having "logical [i.e., black] informants . . . locate NABS chapters and representatives" and by "having informants in a logical position to do so, attend the convention." Not only are agents instructed to find "logical informants" to deal with the "violence-prone" blacks, but "in view of current international situation and the Paris Peace talks" they must spy on pacifists — the Conference of War Resisters International at Haverford, Pa., in August 1969 — and "determine events connected with captioned conference." Fifteen agents ("be most discreet in handling the matter") are "through established sources only [to] make inquiry . . . to determine its scope and whether or not there are any indications it will generate any anti-US propaganda" and to make "efforts . . . to have informants

and sources attend the conference."

When investigating travelers in Russia, agents must move warily, so that "the motives of the Bureau . . . not be construed as infringements of the American educational system and the pursuit of intellectual freedom." The assignment here is to keep watch on all "individuals who meet the criteria of student, professor, or scientist who visited the USSR for at least one month . . . [and] who have not previously been investigated." The purpose is to "ascertain if any attempts have been made by the Soviet Intelligence Services to recruit the individual for intelligence service either in the USSR or after his return to the United States." "The individual" is to be impressed with "the importance of immediately notifying the Bureau of any Soviet attempt to contact him."

Another travel document is a copy of a letter (dated November 4, 1970) sent by a professor of physics at a Western university to the Soviet Embassy inquiring how he and a group of explorer scouts he masters can travel about Russia freely, camping, filming, and meeting their "counterparts." Does the FBI intercept domestic mail on its way to the Russian Embassy, or does it have its own man inside feeding the good things out? Is the letter written in English not because "I don't have a Russian typewriter," but because not every FBI office can read Russian? Or are we to understand that the scoutmaster is offering his trip, his troop, and their cameras to the FBI? Or is he already an agent, having gotten his troop together for some clandestine purpose? Finally, why does Media, Pa., worry about this matter?

Two further documents offer quite full accounts of investigations carried out on the Philadelphia-area college professor to whom we referred earlier, and on a San Francisco-area college student who had been tagged by WF 1577-S in the East as "an inveterate Marxist revolutionist," "far out," a person who "should be watched." So she is watched. We learn where she lives, with whom, her major (Greek), that she has not been in trouble with the local or campus police, that she attended a meeting of the Venceremos Brigade in Oakland the summer of 1970, that her application to the Fourth Contingent of the Brigade was turned down, that she is completely unknown to "SF 3427-PSI, who is familiar with radical activities in the East Bay Area," and that "SF 2231-S (reliable — protect)," who spoke with her at the meeting of the Brigade (during which "there was no discussion of violence or revolution"), puts her down as one of your "average liberal minded students that are common in the . . . area." So the San Francisco office "is not submitting a summary report at this time" and the "subject is not being recommended for inclusion on the Security Index" — until such time as WF 1577-S can be precise about why he thinks her "far out."

The college professor is a more serious matter. He

was being staked out because of the possibility that the two women involved in Boston's joint radical/ex-con bank robbery/cop killing might end up on his doorstep, per reliable Boston informant. So the FBI got in touch with his college's security officer, who gave a brief rundown on the professor and his family (and got it wrong, wrong number of children, wrong number of cars). A neighbor noted that "numerous college students visit [the professor's house] frequently" and promises to "remain alert in his neighborhood for the possible appearance" of the subjects. The chief switchboard operator at the college ("conceal identity due to position at school") volunteered that the professor "is generally regarded as 'radical'" for inviting controversial speakers [Panthers] to the campus without clearing this with others, for conducting open discussions on controversial topics without clearing it with the school administration. She reported that he had not made a long distance call in the last month but that from now on she will "confidentially furnish pertinent information regarding any long distance telephone calls made or received" and "remain alert for any information concerning" the subjects. The local chief of police, we learn, lives only "two houses away," so "he can observe the [professor's] residence from the front of his house." The Chief's only contact with subject has been to break up a rock festival held last summer in the professor's back yard, but his well-situated house allows him to know that the professor's "garage . . . has been converted into a printing shop . . . hous[ing] enough equipment to publish a newspaper"; "he does not know that a newspaper is published there, but he is keeping a close eye on the garage to ascertain what activity takes place there"; "a leaflet was printed there several months ago" calling "for support for [Panthers] scheduled for trial in 1970"; "'hippie types' frequent the garage." The Chief ends with a promise to "remain especially alert for the appearance of the subjects." The local postmaster and through him the letter carrier promise to "remain alert to any mail to or from the [professor's] residence which might be significant in this case." A pretty good day's work for the FBI, though its pertinence to the bank robbery might be questioned.

Finally, as if not busied enough by all the New Left events it must cover, the FBI held its own New Left conference and in Media, Pennsylvania, at least, got into publishing its own New Left Notes (Edition #1, September 16, 1970), to "be produced at irregular intervals as needed to keep those persons dealing with New Left problems up to date in an informal way." Much activity: "The Director has okayed PSI's and SI's [Paid Student Informants and Student Informants, though the Justice Department has denied this without revealing its equivalent translation] age 18 to 21. We have been blocked from this critical age group in

the past. Let us take advantage of this opportunity." It is easier, we are told, to pay a PSI less than "\$300 in a lump sum or per month" than more because it can be handled at a lower echelon. A "pretty general consensus" is reported, "that more interviews with these subjects and hangers-on are in order for plenty of reasons, chief of which are it will enhance the paranoia endemic in these [New Left] circles and will further serve to get the point across there is an FBI Agent behind every mailbox. In addition, some will be overcome by the overwhelming personalities of the contacting agent and volunteer to tell all - perhaps on a continuing basis."

This is the all-American FBI story, with friends and neighbors willing, eager, to play bit roles (perhaps it's those overwhelming personalities). After the Bureau breezed through one Philadelphia-area college town of a winter's day it had its newly found allies watching the "radical" professor's house, reading his mail, monitoring his long distance phone calls. Some do it for money. Others for reflected glory. Meanwhile the Citizens Commission to Investigate the FBI states that it will shortly "contact a first group of these previously undercover agents and suggest they cease their repressive actions if they have not already done so. . . . We will then inform those individuals and organizations against whom these agents were operating. . . . Following that, we will make the names of the first group of agents public." Perhaps the Commission could also find out for us what the FBI was up to when it sent one of its agents last October to flash his credentials before Mrs. George Clarke of Hampton, Virginia, and warn this mother of a prisoner in Vietnam not to try and seek information about her son through the Committee of Liaison, a peace group Hanoi has used to relay news of POWs.

Not all police investigations can be made in broad daylight. Where there is plausible evidence of crime committed or intended (as in kidnapping cases, to take the most obvious example), suspects have to be followed and evidence gathered to support or refute suspicion. But when there's an ossified police bureaucracy run by an autocrat, when the cop at the top can't draw and walk the fine line between getting information a government needs in order to govern wisely, and getting it for Big Brother, he ought to be fired by the President. Hoover should go. Pending that unlikely Presidential dismissal, however, Senator Sam Ervin's subcommittee on Constitutional Rights ought to pursue its investigation into how the FBI collects its information, why, and what it does with it. It ought to study these thousand or so FBI documents, and others, for whatever light they shed on the state of our liberties and our rights to privacy, and it should ask how it is that an agency astute enough to keep close tabs on some professor's mail and long distance calls can't even guard its own files.